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Writing Errors and  
Plain Writing Guide

BUREAU OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SERVICE

DIVISION OF EXTENSION : THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS



## Foreword

Mrs. Maxine B. Shoemaker, elementary teacher in the Austin Public Schools, acted as consultant and prepared the writing examples for this book. We are grateful for her fine work and advice.

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## Instructions to Spelling Contest Graders

### Writing Errors and Plain Writing Examples

Since the Interscholastic League spelling contest is written, both correct spelling and legible writing are inescapably involved. A contestant who can spell a word correctly but cannot write it legibly might as well have spelled it incorrectly, insofar as scoring is concerned. Emphasizing the writing to the exclusion of the spelling or concentrating on the spelling to the detriment of the writing will result in imbalance,—and the contest will limp like a man who has one leg shorter than the other.

Each grading committee should read this pamphlet carefully before grading the papers in the spelling contest. The sponsor and contestant will also find it helpful in preparing for the competition.

#### INSTRUCTIONS TO GRADERS

1. Correct spelling consists in writing in readable hand and in proper order the letters which compose the word.
2. The first authority is the Spelling List, which follows in nearly every case the first spelling given in the latest edition of *Webster's International Dictionary* (unabridged). Note that the most recent (third) edition frequently gives *two* spellings for words, with no preference indicated, either spelling being considered correct.
3. Any correction of the Spelling Bulletin will be published in the "Official Notices" column of the current *Interscholastic Leaguer*. Sponsors and students are requested to report to the League office any error in the Spelling List.
4. If any word is misspelled in any edition of the Spelling List, that word is not to be considered in grading the spelling papers.
5. The following faults in handwriting shall be considered errors:
  - a. An undotted "i" or "j" or an uncrossed "t".

- b. A "Parker r" is admissible if it passes the legibility test; so is the "final t".
- c. A looped "i" or an unlooped "e" or "l".
- d. An "n" or "m" not curved at the top.
- e. A small letter beginning a word which rises as high as two or three-spaced letters in the word or as much as one space above other one-spaced letters in the word and appears to be a capital.
- f. An "o" not closed or looped at the top.
- g. Any malformed letter or illegible letter.\*
- h. Any freakish affectation in handwriting, such as putting a circle instead of a dot over an "i".

6. The wrong use of an apostrophe or a hyphen is considered a miss, and so is an error in capitalization.

7. Since words are to be pronounced in the order in which they are given on the contest list, any word omitted is a miss.

8. If all papers lack the same word, it is considered evident that the pronouncer failed to give that word and its omission is not an error.

9. If all papers have a word other than the one on the contest list, it is considered evident that the pronouncer gave out the wrong word. If the substituted word is correctly spelled, it is not computed as a miss.

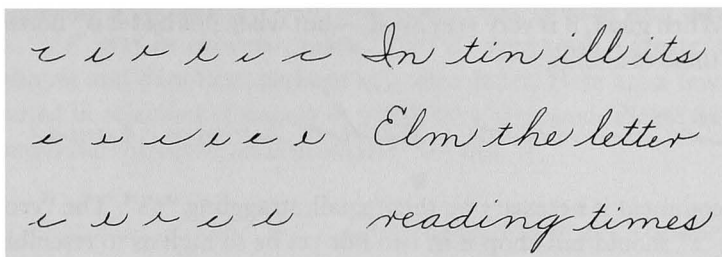
10. Contractions and possessive forms may be written with all letters connected or with letters separate. Either is correct.

## WRITING ERRORS

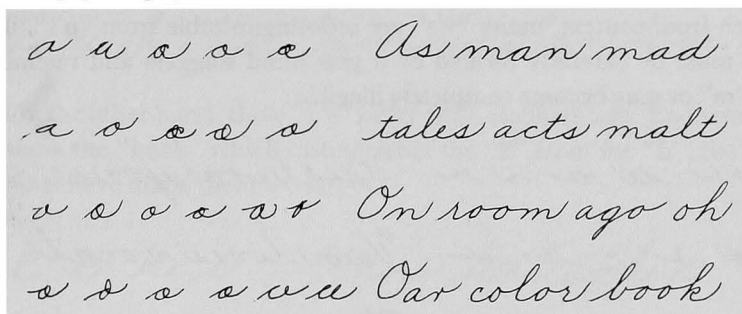
Since it is difficult to describe the writing errors previously noted, certain "horrible examples" are reproduced on the left of this pamphlet, together with the correctly formed letters on the right.

The undotted "i" and the unlooped "e" are each considered a miss. Yet the State Office each year receives papers containing marks which are unlooped and undotted and could be read for either. Compare the examples from such papers on the left with the correctly formed letters from handwriting texts on the right:

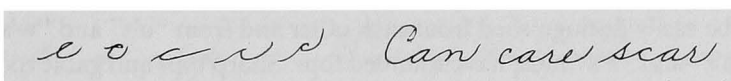
*\* Note: To determine whether a given letter is legible, place a blank piece of paper on either side of it, separating it from its context; if the character can then be identified, it is considered legible.*



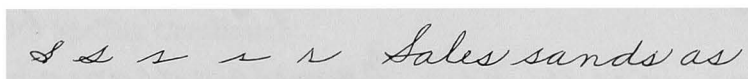
The “a” and the “o” are also easily confused if not written plainly. The looped “o” may degenerate into a mark resembling an “a”. The downstroke on the first example does not follow to the line; little curlicues mar the legibility of the second, third and fourth “a”. The next to the last specimen has an open, gaping mouth, while the last has loops which make it look like two “e’s” bumping heads. Either would spoil an otherwise perfect paper. The looped “o’s”, culled from spelling papers, are fine examples of *improper* writing. Note that the correctly written “o” is not round but slightly flattened and that the terminal stroke does not drop promptly to the line as does the final stroke in the “a”.



Written too hurriedly, a “c” can become an “e”.

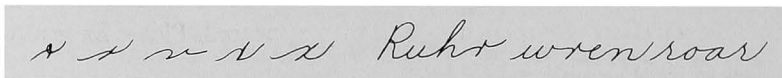


The “s” is usually not too difficult but the bottom stroke should not be a loop unless a capital is intended.



Another small letter that is difficult is “r”. The League office is often asked if the so-called “Parker r” is correct. When properly made, it is

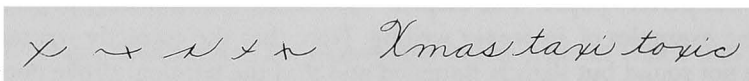
good. When good, it is very very good,—but when it is bad it is “horrid”, as are these examples:



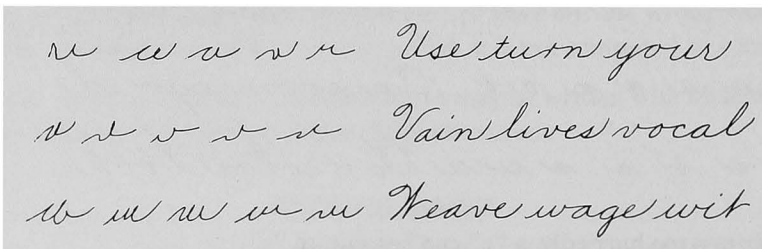
No comment is necessary on these small, straggling “t’s”. The “cross” on the “t” should not chop it in two nor yet be so high as to resemble a hat that was too small:



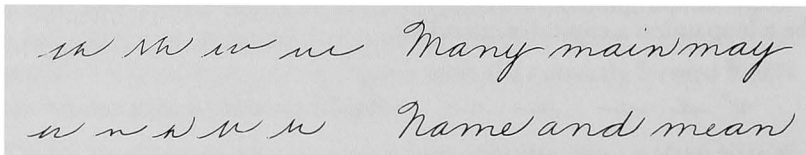
The “x” is seldom used, being less frequently required; badly written, it can be mistaken for an “r” or, if left incomplete, be illegible:



The similar letters “u”, “v” and “w” can bring a contestant to grief. Taken from context, many “v’s” are indistinguishable from “u’s”. The “w” must be carefully formed or it gets blind staggers and resembles the “m” or may become completely illegible:

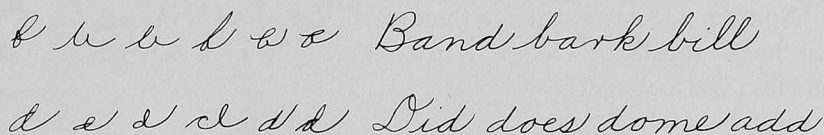


To be easily distinguished from each other and from “u’s” and “w’s”, the “m’s” and “n’s” must have rounded tops. Sharp tops and gable roofs are both wrong:



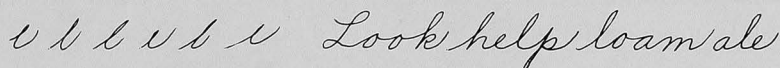
The larger letters which sit on the line, “l”, “b”, “d”, “h” and “k”

are usually more legible; some contestants have trouble with these, too. The “b’s” may be carelessly made. The “d” appears in a greater variety of shapes and sizes than perhaps any other letter. Here are a few which resulted in rejection of papers in which they appeared. Please fix firmly in mind the correct formation of both “b” and “d”.



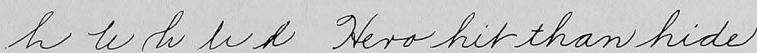
*b b b b b Band bark bill*  
*d d d d d Did does dome add*

Could these marks be “l’s”? Both “l” and “e” must have a loop:



*h h h h h Look help loam ale*

These “h’s” suffer from malnutrition and are nearing collapse. Compare with the “healthy” specimens:



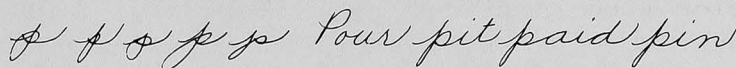
*k k k k k Nero hit than hide*

On the other hand, these “k’s” suffer from elephantiasis. Endeavoring to show the “hook” which distinguishes the “k” from the “h”, the contestants have made them too large:



*p p p p p Know keel token*

Another letter often too “fat” is the “p”. These need diet and exercise to bring them down to proper proportion:



*j j j j j Pour pit paid pin*

The “j” is frequently ill-formed, perhaps because it is not often used. Horrible examples shown prevented the contestant from receiving his 100% Spelling Certificate:



*x x x x x James jot jail jest*



The letter "f" has one loop or wing above the line and one below, coming together gracefully like a wasp in the center. "These "f's" were disqualified by the State Grading Committee:

f f f f b f Four fable fare

f f f b f f b Four Five fable if

Other below-the-line letters are "g", "q", "y" and "z". These do not offer as much trouble but should also be neatly written:

G g q g y Grade gay gout go

h q q q y Quest quote squire

Y y y y y Your day yes ahoy

z z z z z Zest zero azure zip

From the foregoing examples, it is not to be assumed that handwriting is the most important part of the contest. The *spelling* of the word is still the crux of the matter.

Remember that the final test of the correctness of a word is its legibility. If the grader will put postcards, or other nontransparent papers, on either side of the letter in question, so that it stands alone he can decide if it is legible. Even though it may not be perfectly written, any letter is considered correct which can still be identified when separated from the remainder of the word.